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UNCLAS CALCUTTA 000101

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS, S/CT AND INR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: ULFA BLASTS ACROSS ASSAM

1. (U) Over three days from March 8-10, a series of blasts rocked the Northeast Indian state of Assam. A senior Assam Police officer told Post that in a total of 17 violent incidents - bomb blasts and grenade attacks -- one policeman died, and three policemen and two civilians were injured. The incidents took place across Assam: near the airport in Guwahati, in the state capital, at the commercial center of Fancy Bazar, against oil pipelines in Tinsuki district of Upper Assam, and at telecommunications buildings in Nagaon and Sibsagar Districts. An omb expert of the state police died while attempting to defuse a timed device in Bomgaigaon District. All fingers point to the separatist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) as the suspected perpetrator. Founded in 1979 to establish a sovereign, socialist Assam, the outfit is believed to be laying a trail of violence in the run-up to its "army day" on March 16. As such, more violent attacks are likely over the coming week.

2. (SBU) ULFA's Commander-in-Chief Paresh Barua reportedly told Eastern India's BBC correspondent that his guerrillas were responsible for all the explosions. Based in neighboring Bangladesh, Barua alleged that the GOI is "dragging its feet over starting negotiations," so "the war" must continue. At least partly thanks to a mediatory role played by Assamese writer Indira Raisom Goswami, who is in contact with Barua, the GOI has expressed willingness to hold talks with the ULFA. However, it has declared that such talks be without preconditions, particularly regarding the issue of sovereignty. Barua has so far been adamant that sovereignty is central to the ULFA struggle and must be on the table in any discussions.

3. (SBU) Following military attacks on the outfit's Bhutan bases in December 2003, a sizeable number of ULFA cadres are believed to have shifted to neighboring areas, mainly Bangladesh and Burma. Most observers believe the ULFA leadership to be based in Bangladesh. The ULFA has suffered erosion in public support owing to its killing of civilians over the past year. As a result, a police intelligence contact said that the bombers apparently did not want to inflict heavy casualties but rather intended to draw attention to the organization's continuing destructive potential.

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